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ABSTRACT

The independent reading program described in this lesson plan gives students time to read what they want to read, share what they have read, and receive the support they need for further reading explorations and reflections. Students will: work in a community of readers and learners, including other class members, family members, their teacher, and other school volunteers; focus on lifelong learning strategies by providing experiences, formats, frameworks, and attitudes for study in the present and future; participate in student-centered learning; explore their ideas, reflect on their writing, and revise their work; and read and discuss texts in guided and independent practice, using literacy as a way to think, as a tool for understanding. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. Attached are excerpts from "Volunteers Working with Young Readers" (Lester L. Laminack); a list of questions to use in book chats; a reading portfolio form; "Positive Parent Involvement" (Arlene Midgett Clausell); and "Becoming Proactive: The Quiet Revolution" (Cathy Fleischer, Kathleen Hayes-Parvin, and Julie A. King). (RS)

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A Daily DEAR Program: Drop Everything, and Read!

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Adapted by
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Champaign, Illinois

Grade Band

3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

One 30-minute session daily

Overview

The teacher shouts, "Drop Everything and Read!" and students settle into their seats to read books they've selected.

This independent reading is much more than a just-sit-there-and-read experience. It gives the teacher a structured time to touch base with each student over a period of time, assess progress, and target instruction. Even more important, it gives students time to read what they want to read, share what they've read, and receive the support they need for further reading explorations and reflections.

From Theory to Practice

This lesson is based on Deb Foertsch's Reading program, as described in Sierra-Perry, Martha. 1996. *Standards in Practice: Grades 3-5*. Urbana: NCTE. pp. 2-25.

Foertsch's ideas are based on these beliefs about literacy instruction and learning:

Students learn best

- in a community of learners;
- in a safe environment;
- when reading, writing, speaking, and listening occur across the curriculum;
- when literacy instruction blends deomonstration and explanation, guided and independent practice, teacher and student support, individual pursuits, student choices, and teacher direction; and
- when learning is student-centered, with hands, minds, and hearts engaged.

This lesson draws on all these beliefs as part of a daily reading program where students select their own readings and share their reactions to the texts with others in the learning community.

Student Objectives

Students will

- work in a community of readers and learners, including other class members, family members, their teacher, and other school volunteers.

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- focus on lifelong learning strategies by providing experiences, formats, frameworks, and attitudes for study in the present and future.
- participate in student-centered learning.
- explore their ideas, reflect on their writing, and revise their work.
- read and discuss texts in guided and independent practice, using literacy as a way to think, as a tool for understanding.

Resources

- How Can You Help? Your First Days as a Volunteer Article
- Example Scenarios from Laminack's *Volunteers Working with Young Readers*
- Book Chat Questions
- Reading Portfolio Form
- Reading-Response Journal Starters
- Reader's-Writer's Log Instructions
- Positive Parent Involvement Cyberbrief
- *Becoming Proactive: The Quiet Revolution* Article
- Response Journal Guidelines for Students

Instructional Plan

Resources

- A collection of books appropriate for the students' interests and reading levels.
- Timer, or some method to indicate the beginning and end of the DEAR period.
- Chart or handouts of Literature Log format and prompting questions.
- Reading portfolio form.
- Sign-up system for students requesting book talks with an adult volunteer (PALs).
- Handout and sign-up system for adults working as PALs.
- Mail center, where each student receives mail from others.
- General classroom supplies (paper, pens, and so forth).

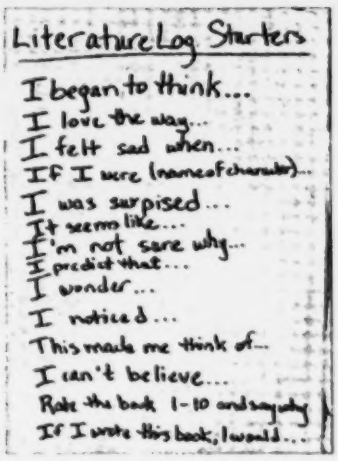
Preparation

- Gather books, handouts, and other materials.
- Customize an appropriate handout of prompts for starting Literature Logs to fit the needs of your students, from the examples in the Web Resources.
- Explain the program to family adults and other volunteers, and line up PALs to work with students individually.
- Work through the entire process as a group before proceeding to individual work. Hold a book conference with a student in front of the class so that students are prepared for their own conferences. You might do a short read-aloud book that all students respond to in their literature logs, hold an example conference on that book, and then invite a volunteer to hold a Book Chat in front of the class before students begin working on their own.

Instruction and Activities

Daily Sessions

1. Relying on in-class reading collections or materials from the library, have each student select a book to read in class. Students may also bring books from home.
2. With students who have not done silent readings before, start slowly, about 10 minutes a day. Gradually inch them up to 20 to 30 minutes. This is what Foertsch calls DEAR—drop everything, and read—reading because otherwise the class never seems to get their reading time in at the same time every day. This is a specific, structured time for reading.
3. Allow an additional 5 to 15 minutes for students to write in their literature logs (or you may call them "reader-response logs"). Students may continue reading during this log time if they choose. The logs do not have to be written in each day, but they must reflect the students' thinking about literature as they read. Log entries must include the date, the book title and author, and the student's response to the text read. Early in the year, model log entries and provide an outline of the format as well as some prompting questions as a handout or poster in the classroom (see the Web Resources for some examples).
4. Once the silent reading period is over, students may continue reading in their spare time in the classroom as well as at home.


Literature Log Starters
I began to think...
I love the way...
I felt sad when...
If I were (name of character)...
I was surprised...
It seems like...
I'm not sure why...
I predict that...
I wonder...
I noticed...
This made me think of...
I can't believe...
Rate the book 1-10 and say why
If I wrote this book, I would...

PAL Orientation Session

PAL stands for "Partners Assisting Literacy"—these are the adult volunteers (parents, grandparents, older siblings, extended family members, and other community members) who assist in the DEAR program by holding Book Chats with students after they have finished reading their books and have had conferences with the teacher.

To ensure that your PAL volunteers are comfortable with their job, have a special session that goes through how book chats work:

1. Thank the volunteers for being part of the program.
2. Overview the entire DEAR program for the volunteers.
3. Explore the volunteers' role in the program. Some volunteers feel inadequate about what to say with the students, and some are a little too eager to "teach those reading skills" or assess students' progress. Explain that the purpose of the Book Chats is to lend an ear to the students' voices when they speak of a book they've been part of.
4. Emphasize that the point of the Book Chats is to encourage further reading explorations.
5. Once the volunteers understand the purpose of the Book Chats, go over the Book Chat questions. Explain that the questions are starting places, not a script for the discussion. Urge volunteers to choose one or two from the list as as guide to discussing the book in more depth.
6. With a volunteer, go through a mock Book Chat, demonstrating what the conference looks like.
7. Caution volunteers that they may have to "cut students off" (gently, but firmly) from retelling the entire book with every detail.
8. Share samples of all handouts that students will have as well as any examples you have of students' Literature Logs responses and PAL letters to students.

Teacher Conference Session

These sessions take place whenever a student finishes reading a book. The frequency of these sessions is based on the students' progress. As the teacher, you will likely be engaged in these sessions most weeks, but individual students may not be involved as frequently.

1. When students finish a book, ask them to bring the book and the literature log to you for a short

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conference.
2. Discuss the book with the student, focusing on his or her progress and success.
3. Record the student's progress, noting the type of book read and reading behaviors and attitudes observed.
4. Ask the student to record the title of the book on a list of completed books in his or her Reading Portfolio.
5. Have the student sign up for a book talk with an adult volunteer.

PAL Book Talk Session

1. Have the PAL volunteer set up in the hallway.
2. The PAL volunteer checks the sign-up sheet and quietly takes a student, with his or her literature log and book, to the hall for a book chat.
3. The volunteer asks questions, working from the Book Chat handout. Conferences should always begin by asking the student to share something from the book, a particular passage that they will discuss further. Discussions should be no more than 8 minutes, and should focus on positive, encouraging comments.
4. The student returns to the classroom.
5. The PAL volunteer writes a short, encouraging note to the student, places it in the classroom mailbox for distribution, and proceeds to the next student on the sign-up sheet.

Web Resources

Reader's-Writer's Log Instructions
http://www.carman.k12.mi.us/Highschweb/hsstaff/sbobalik/readerwriterlog.htm
These Reader's-Writer's Log instructions from Carman-Ainsworth Community Schools, based on the work of Nancie Atwell, provide starting places for students' Literature Logs.

Reading-Response Journal Starters
http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/1886.html
These reading-response journal starters give readers a place to begin their entries in their Literature Logs. This list of starter prompts would work well with younger readers.

Response Journal Guidelines for Students
http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/actbank/tjouguide.htm
Response Journal Guidelines for Students from the San Diego County Office of Education provide another list of options to help students respond to their readings in their Literature Logs. These longer questions may need to be broken up for younger students.

Positive Parent Involvement
http://www.ncte.org/elem/cyberbriefs/parent_involvement.shtml
The "Positive Parent Involvement" CyberBrief outlines several successful ideas to add to your repertoire to get families to participate actively in your class. These ideas provide a great starting point for gathering PALs volunteers to work with your students.

How Can You Help? Your First Days as a Volunteer
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson55/Ch01.PDF
"How Can You Help? Your First Days as a Volunteer," chapter one from Lester Laminack's *Volunteers Working with Young Readers*, explains ways that adults can participate in classes with students. The chapter provides a nice overview for PALs volunteers who want to know more.

Example Scenarios from Laminack's *Volunteers Working with Young Readers*
http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson55/examples.PDF

These example scenarios from Laminack's *Volunteers Working with Young Readers* give you a thumbnail sketch of some of the possibilities of students' interaction with texts. Each situation introduces a child and a bit of literacy history, followed by some things to consider before taking action, and a few suggestions for working with the specific situation. The scenarios will give your PALs volunteers examples that can help them feel more comfortable as they work with your students.

Becoming Proactive: The Quiet Revolution
http://www.ncte.org/pdfs/members-only/vm/0063-march99/VM0063Becoming.pdf

"Becoming Proactive: The Quiet Revolution," by Cathy Fleischer, Kathleen Hayes-Parvin, and Julie A. King, explores ways to "educate parents about what really goes on in a classroom that incorporates . . . choice in reading." This *Voices from the Middle* article provides useful tactics that will help your PALs volunteers understand their role within the larger literacy program in your classroom.

Student Assessment/Reflections

Assessment takes place several times for each book that students read:

- Students reflect upon and assess their own reading and thinking as they discuss the books in the literature logs and in conferences.
- Students record their completion of each book in their reading portfolios.
- Teachers record student strengths and needs, as well as what might be done differently and what to watch for in order to encourage and support students' reading efforts.
- PALs volunteers assess and react to students in conference and in the note that they deliver to the mailbox for each student.

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

read·write·think

International Reading Association NCTE marcopolo

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Volunteers Working with Young Readers
Lester L. Laminack
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Chapter 1

Volunteers in the Classroom

How Can You Help?
Your First Days as a Volunteer

So you're all ready to jump in there and help a child on the way to becoming a proficient reader. Thank you. Teachers appreciate willing volunteers in their busy days and crowded classrooms. If you are volunteering in a classroom, remember that the teacher is responsible for all the children in that class. Therefore, you should always work closely with the teacher in planning your visits and in devising an assessment plan that can guide your work with a child or group. The classroom teacher will have the greatest insight into the individual needs of each child and the specific requirements of the curriculum. You would be wise to use the teacher's knowledge as one of your primary resources.

In the classroom, there will be children who are very proficient readers for their age. Those children can often function independently. Other children will be making average- to slightly less-than-average progress in their development as readers and writers. While still others may be struggling with reading. It is my opinion that your role as volunteer in the classroom should be to work with those children who are making slightly less-than-average progress. Those very proficient readers can either work independently or with peers making average or better progress. Your work with slightly below-average students frees the teacher to work with those students who are struggling most. In essence, your presence not only provides much-needed individual and small-group instruction for specific children, it also provides the most highly skilled professional in the classroom with an opportunity to maximize time spent with the least proficient, most "in-need" students in the class.

So maybe you're wondering what you'll be doing when you volunteer your time. There are several ways you can be helpful.

Some Possibilities

What follows is a list of possibilities for your involvement. This list is intended to provide some general guidance as you begin your work as a volunteer.

1. Reading aloud to the class, to a small group, or to an individual child (your reading partner)
- choose books you enjoy
- always rehearse the book aloud before reading for an audience
- remember to give the title as well as the name(s) of the author and illustrator
- use your voice to set the tone or mood of the story
- use your voice to bring the characters to life

2. Listening to a child read aloud
- invite the child to bring something to read for you each time
- listen without interrupting the reader
- expect the child to have a rationale for the selection
- resist the urge to correct every misread word
- make a note when the child struggles with a word or misreads a word that alters meaning

3. Working with a small group over time
- participate in a literature circle

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- assist in locating books and other materials for literature circles, author studies, genre studies, or topic studies
- participate in an inquiry project
- assist in recording what is known about the topic
- assist in generating and recording questions for inquiry
- assist the group in making connections between the topic and materials they have previously read
- assist in writing a script for a play, producing the play, and performing the play

4. Working with an individual child over time

- read aloud to the child
- listen to the child read
- help the child locate other titles of interest
- assist in making connections between books
- demonstrate reading strategies that will broaden the child's repertoire

Now let's take each of these activities and open them up a bit. The following elaboration may give you a deeper understanding of each of the possibilities listed above.

Read Aloud to the Class, to a Small Group, or to an Individual Child (Your Reading Partner)

When I was in elementary school I used to look forward to "library day"—that day when my class got to go to the library for the selection of new books. But, selecting a new book was not the thing I looked forward to most about library day. I longed for the voice of Mrs. Hand, our librarian. She could take any story to new heights through her careful, thoughtful, and casually dramatic rendering of text. Her voice was smooth, velvety, and a little deep for a woman, I always thought. A voice something like that of actress Patricia Neal. She could make us tremble at the scary parts. Bring tears at the sad parts. Send us reeling at the humor. She could draw us up to the edge of our seats and nearly have us teetering on the brink of disaster at the dangerous feats of our heroes.

It was in that library sitting in the presence of Mrs. Hand, wrapped in the velvet cloak that was her voice that I believed myself into reading my first chapter book. Mrs. Hand would read just a chapter of *The Boxcar Children* and leave us suspended in space until the next Thursday. All week we talked about Henry, Jesse, Violet, and little Benny hiding out in that boxcar. All week we pretended to be them in the woods at the edge of our school yard. All week we guessed and plotted out what would happen next. Mrs. Hand taught me to hold a story in my hands, to carry it with me throughout the week. She taught me to relish the events of a fictitious place, to go there and visit with my new friends. I will never forget her voice, her love of books, her love for children nor her gift of reading aloud.

Reading aloud to children in groups or as individuals plays an important role in their overall literacy development. This seemingly simple and rather pleasurable act accomplishes so much with so little effort. Being read to allows children the opportunity to become familiar with the language of story, poetry, information books, pamphlets, directions, etc. In addition, it is through the experience of listening to an engaging reader that children first begin to grasp the notion that those marks on the page tell fascinating stories. The act of reading aloud to children demonstrates how written language should sound, what readers do with phrasing, intonation, inflection to bring life to otherwise still and quiet print. Through repeated readings of favorite stories, children come to understand that the print tells the story, that print is stable and says the same thing each time it is read. Rereading could also allow you to discover more meaning in the same words. Reading aloud allows children to see and hear how language can be organized in various forms to accomplish a variety of purposes for different audiences. For example, the language in a *Frog and Toad* story is organized differently than the language of a pamphlet for the hands-on science museum the class will visit next month on a field trip. The language of a predictable book such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* is organized differently than the language of a traditional tale such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

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It is through repeated exposure to such language that children first begin to explore the possibility of using different forms in their own writing. In each meeting with your reading partner plan some time to read aloud for the child's pleasure. It's valuable instruction without pain. Here are some things to keep in mind when reading aloud to children. Read the story or text yourself a few times and rehearse it aloud before sharing it with an audience, even an audience of one. Know where you need to slow down, where a word needs to stretch, where you need to increase the speed or volume a bit. Know where your voice needs to rise and fall. Note the use at punctuation, line breaks, bold print and other conventions of print as signals to how the language should sound. All these things enhance the delivery of the story, engage the listener, and bring the characters to life. In *A Sense of Wonder* (1995) Katherine Paterson has said "'Let me hear you read it' is a test. 'Let me read it to you' is a gift" (pp. 281-282). In short, think of your reading aloud as a gift. Select carefully with knowledge of the recipient in mind; package it beautifully and present it with love.

Jim Trelease (1982) in his now famous book, *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, offers some additional advice, which I have summarized below, combining it with my own suggestions on the subject.

- The art of listening is taught and cultivated gradually.
- Don't feel that you have to tie every book to classwork.
- Don't overwhelm the audience. When choosing a book you should consider the intellectual, social, and emotional level of your audience.
- Don't read stories that you don't enjoy yourself.
- Don't start unless you have time to do justice to the story.
- Adjust your pace to fit the story.
- Reluctant readers or unusually active children frequently find it difficult to just sit and listen. Paper, crayons, and pencils allow them to keep their hands busy while listening.
- Don't be fooled by awards. Not all award-winning books make good read-alouds.
- Use plenty of expression when reading. Change the tone of your voice to fit the dialogue or set the mood when possible.

Listening to a Child Read Aloud

A good listener is hard to find. Too often, children view the act of reading aloud to an adult as a test of some sort. Many children, especially those who are developing more slowly as readers, are asked to read to an adult only for the adult to assess progress. At each meeting with your young partner, invite the child to select something to read to you. Let the child know you expect to hear why he or she picked this selection to read for you. Therefore, at each meeting, before you begin to read aloud to the child, you should introduce your selection (book, story, poem, etc.) and also tell why you chose it. For example, "I found the most beautiful book to read for you today. It's called *All the Places to Love*. I just love the way this sounds, just listen. And the pictures are so real. It makes me feel as if I could step into the book. I chose this one because it reminds me of my visits to my grandmother's farm when I was little. I hope you enjoy it."

By doing this each time you read aloud for the child, you repeat a demonstration that will help your young partner learn the possibilities for how books are selected, the reasons for sharing, and the driving force behind our pleasures in reading aloud.

When the child presents his or her selection remember to be a good listener. Focus on the selection and the child's reasons for choosing it. The child may choose a piece because it is very funny. Then you validate the humor. Perhaps because of the rich description, in which case you validate the image-rich language. Maybe the selection was chosen because it was confusing. Then, you note the confusion and help to clarify. Whatever the rationale, try to help support the child's growing sense of self as reader and writer. Try to help the child grow into the literate life he or she has envisioned. Support strategies for making selections and continue to offer demonstrations of how you do that yourself.

As the child reads aloud to you, accept the gift graciously and don't turn the event into an evaluation. Resist the urge to correct every misread word. Encourage the child to ask her- or himself if the language is making sense. You might note on an index card or a sticky note when the child struggles with a word or misreads a word that alters meaning (for example, horse for house). These notes will give you something to come back to later (see Chapter 3 for a more in depth discussion of the topic).

Working with a Small Group over Time

In this setting you will be working with your partner and a few other students. Consult with the host teacher to select group members who may have common interests and who may work well together. This small group may represent several levels of ability, and that should be viewed as a positive factor. Clearly this setting will bring children with diverse talents and needs together. Allow children to emerge as leaders where they have talents. You may find that your reading partner works well in a small group. In fact, you will likely discover that you learn a great deal from the interaction that occurs among children. These meetings with your reading partner as a member of a small group may provide you with the insight needed to focus some instruction during your one-on-one time. For example, members of the small group may demonstrate a strategy that you and your partner could borrow.

The small group setting provides an opportunity for you to see your partner employ strategies, observe others, or try out new strategies. You may find it useful to participate with your partner in a literature circle or to assist a small group through the process of an inquiry project, or the production of a play.

Literature Circles. If the idea of a literature circle is new to you it may be helpful to think about a book group you've participated in as an adult or to think about the book club featured on Oprah Winfrey's popular talk show. In each case a small group of people comes together because of common interest in the topic, admiration for the work of a particular author, or shared interest in the specific title or genre selected. These folks do not come together because they have similar scores on a test or show similar deficits in some particular skill. Instead, it is shared interest and common enthusiasm that brings them together. When folks gather for these "book clubs" the selection of a book is usually agreed upon by the members of the group and not imposed by someone else. Typically, there's a standard meeting time and place, and the group agrees upon the amount of time to be devoted to the book. If the group plans to meet prior to reading the whole book, they would agree to reading a specified amount of text for each meeting. The focus of each meeting is to share insights and confusions. The group gathers to discuss what they've connected with and made sense of. They also share what troubles or puzzles them. The discussion builds around these connections and confusions and may extend interpretations of the text. In essence, the group dynamics expands on the third view of reading (see page 5 in the Introduction). Here the insight and understanding gained by the reader rests not only with what the individual brings to the text because in this setting, the reader has the ideas, experiences, and language of the other members of the group to draw upon as well. In the literature circle, then, the interplay between reader and writer enlarges now to an interaction between readers and writer and *among readers* as well.

Also of note is the fact that when folks come together in these settings, there is usually no "quizzing" to see if all the members are prepared for the meeting. When questions are asked, they are asked out of genuine interest in the answers and opinions of others or from a true need to know. In short, this process emphasizes meaning, sharing ideas, broadening insights, and reducing confusions. It isn't about searching the page to find the "right" answer to someone else's questions.

The idea behind literature circles in the classroom is to provide that same opportunity for sharing perspectives, for making meaning, and reading for understanding. The intent is to allow children to bring their insights and interpretations and confusions to a group of their peers, who have interest in the same text. This is important for several reasons:

- children learn that comprehension is more than giving the "right" answer to someone else's questions
- children learn that comprehension is more a process of making sense of what is read than a process of finding the answer on the page

- children learn that sharing differing perspectives broadens the views of everyone and deepens the insights of all who participate
- children learn to read with an open mind seeking broader points of view, questioning the ideas of the writer, seeking to make set of what is read, and to go beyond the details on the page
- children learn to value their own ideas and to respect the views of others even if they are different from their own.

As with any other strategy you work with in the classroom, it is always wise to begin by consulting with the teacher to seek suggestions and feedback as you make plans. Let the teacher be your guide and primary resource. Remember, your work should support and extend the foundation being built in that classroom. The person with the deepest insight into that foundation and with the greatest knowledge of the children there is the classroom teacher. If you are working in a program outside the school setting, your program coordinator would assume this role.

So you may be wondering just what you would do as the adult in this setting. Let's say you are working with a student in the third grade and the teacher suggests that you work with the child and a small group in a literature circle. First, consult the teacher for suggestions to identify appropriate books. You should also talk with the child to find out her interests and whether she has favorite authors or favorite types of stories. Armed with that information consult the librarian/media specialist in the school and bring three or four choices to the child. Give the child a brief "advertisement" for each book and have her identify her first and second choices. Now, your task is to locate enough copies of the book for each student who will be joining the group. In some cases, the teacher may prefer to establish the groups and identify the titles to be selected. If not, you would consult with the teacher to determine which children might be considered for joining your group. Then, you and your partner would present the selection as an invitation for three or four other children to join you in a literature circle with the selected book.

In many classrooms, literature circles will be a standard part of the reading program. In that case, you would simply join the circle your partner has selected. How these are established is determined by the classroom teacher and the children. However, children are typically given several options and join a circle on the basis of their interest in the book or author. As with adults, membership in a literature circle is not generally determined by a test score or skill deficit.

When the circle meets the first time, the group will need to agree upon meeting times, the amount to have read for each meeting, and a final date for having the book finished. Peterson and Eeds (1990) suggest using a literature study contract, which could look something like this.

Literature Study Contract

Name _____Date _____

Title _____

Author _____

I agree to read this book by _____.

This book has a total of ____ pages. I will pace myself according to the schedule below.

Monday _____pages
Tuesday _____pages
Wednesday _____pages
Thursday _____pages
Friday _____pages
Saturday _____pages
Sunday _____pages

I will be prepared for meeting with my circle on _____
Student's signature _____
Tutor's signature _____
Teacher's signature _____
Parent's signature _____

Once the literature circle is formed and the limits have been set, you may play several roles. Your primary role, though, is to support your reading partner. You may listen to him read in between meetings of the circle. You may read with him or to him. You may take a copy of the book home and read it on tape so that he can use a "walkman" with a headset to listen and follow along. You may be reading the same pages at the same time, serving as a sounding board for his ideas, insights, and confusions to build confidence for his full participation in the circle. In short, you provide the level of support needed to allow the child to participate in the conversation with his peers. The type of support will differ from book to book depending upon the content, language, writing style, the child's familiarity with the topic, and his level of comfort with the text.

When the circle meets remember the purpose of the process is not to quiz the members to see if they have read. Instead, you and the children may begin by sharing your general impressions, talking through connections made to other texts (books, poems, songs, movies, etc.), sharing personal connections with the text, talking through confusions or things that made you wonder, and sharing observations or things you noted as a reader. Remember, one goal is to enrich and deepen the readers' understandings and insights. Peterson and Eeds (1990) remind us that "[w]hen a topic surfaces that commands the group's interest and has a potential for altering perception, the talk shifts from sharing to dialogue. Through dialogue, the group . . . works to disclose meaning, thereby potentially expanding the meaning of the work for all participants . . . . Through the collaborative work of the group, time is spent contemplating meaning, and digesting it. Group members help each other begin to see where previously they may have only looked. Our job . . . is to help with this seeing" (p. 13).

In many classrooms, the members of literature circles also keep reading response logs. Again, it is wise to check with your host teacher to determine the extent to which response logs are used. Basically, the log is a place for the reader to record general impressions, to note connections to other texts and to personal experiences, and to write through confusions and noticings. The log could be just a blank notebook or may take a more structured format. A possible structure couldn't include any or all of the following:

- brief retelling
- observations and insights
- connections to other texts
- connections to personal experience
- confusions

The retelling allows readers an opportunity to express the essence of the story in their own words. The observations might focus on details in the story, the writer's choice of words, the use of a repeated phrase throughout the book. The connections to other texts invite readers to note how the story reminds them of other books, stories, poems, movies, TV shows, music, etc. The point is to note how knowledge of various texts makes it easier to make meaning of new texts and to help readers realize that some themes cut across the human experience. The connections to personal experience help readers to bring meaning to the text in order to make sense of the text. Recognizing our personal experiences in the stories of others can be very validating. The confusions might include misunderstandings, a need for more information, clarification of vocabulary, or just curiosity about the plot or why the author chose to write the story as it is.

The writing that readers do in the response logs can be the springboard into the conversations that take place in the literature circles. In short, the whole process is one of read, write, and talk. Each component is of great significance and contributes to the making of meaning. You might say this process is view

three of reading (see Introduction) in action. Clearly, the readers must rely upon all their skills and strategies, making use of all available cues both on the page and in the mind. And most important, the goal—the end result is making sense of what is read.

Locating Books and Other Material for Literature Circles, Author Studies, Genre Studies, or Topic Studies. If you want to help between your tutoring sessions you could assist the teacher in locating texts for literature circles, author studies, genre studies, and topic studies. You may locate and collect books by an author (e.g., titles by Eric Carle, by Bill Martin Jr., and by others) or books about the same topic (e.g., titles about losing a tooth, about moving to a new town, etc.). In this way, you will help to continue the literature circles within the classroom by locating books for your partner and other groups. Your reading partner will benefit from continued participation in literature study. Reading with a small group with a common interest in a title, author, genre, or topic allows your partner to observe the strategies and connections of other readers in the class. In a classroom where a more traditional view of reading is practiced, the developing reader rarely has the opportunity to participate in reading with more proficient readers. Therefore, the strategies most often observed are those of the less proficient readers in the class. It is no wonder that these students tend to have limited skills and strategies. To encourage further participation, it might benefit your partner, as well as others in the class, if you locate sets of books that might be used by the children between your visits. Consult with your host teacher to determine the authors, titles, topics, and genres that might be most appropriate. You can often find enough copies by borrowing from classroom collections in your host school. You may also want to check the school and local libraries. And don't forget to consult the librarians for guidance in using technology that may make the search more fruitful. If you plan ahead, you may find that children have copies to loan and that friends of yours may have copies stored away in their own children's book collections. Suggest any you find particularly interesting yourself. Some possibilities are also included in the appendix.

Inquiry Project. In many classrooms children participate in a process of inquiring about a topic of intense interest or significance. The process could include identifying the topic; discussing and recording what is already known or believed to be true; generating questions for research; locating resources (print and nonprint); reading, viewing, listening, and note taking; reviewing new information and generating more specific questions; more reading, viewing, note taking; synthesizing the information and deciding how to share the findings. You can help your partner or group talk through the topic and assist with recording what is known. Some teachers do this with a web, some prefer a K-W-L chart. The -K- is the heading for the column where you record what is **K**nown. The -W- heads the column for what we **W**ant to know and the -L- heads the column for what was **L**earned.

As you and the child(ren) get the known recorded, move on to the questions that will guide your search for resources and new information. You should note that initially the questions are likely to be very simple. Remember that the children may need the opportunity to locate a few resources and gather a bit of information before they have enough information to ask more in-depth questions. You may find it helpful to cluster the questions around categories. For example, if the topic is polar bears, the questions might easily cluster around these categories: *physical characteristics, habitat, diet, care, and feeding of the young.* Having the questions and categories can help with locating resources. You could easily use this opportunity to demonstrate the function of the table of contents, the glossary, the appendix, the card catalog, and any technology the library may have to aid in the search for material. For example, as you and your partner begin the search for information, help your partner clearly identify the questions. Next, you may review the table of contents for each of your print resources and compare the entries with each of your questions. As you find a match, place the question number on a sticky note and affix the note on the corresponding page in that resource. This will help your partner learn how to locate information using reference skills and to reduce the amount of time needed.

The appendix can also be used to make your partner's use of resources more efficient. For example, the categories from the polar bear web are key headings for information. You and your partner could use sticky notes (perhaps a different color this time) to list each heading. Then turn to the index in your first resource to search for the category: *habitat.* On the sticky note, jot down the corresponding page numbers. Repeat this process for each resource and each heading. In doing this with your partner, you demonstrate how readers make efficient use of resources. The appendixes in books can be useful in

similar ways, and the glossary can be used to help your partner define unfamiliar terms and to discover other key terms that may prove useful in the quest for information.

The categories from the web can be also useful for organizing notes and may become headings in the final product if the child(ren) should decide to write a summary of the findings. Remember that inquiry, the search for information and insight, tends to feed itself. Each cycle of this process will lead to greater insight, better questions, more skill with identifying and locating resources and more in-depth note taking, and more informed readers and writers. Clearly, this will require focused reading and writing and is a process that will not be limited to one subject. These experiences also enable you to see the range of strategies and skills employed in the classroom. That insight can only broaden the possibilities for you and your partner.

Producing a Play. Most of us can remember being part of a school play during those elementary grades. You may remember the part you played or the butterflies in your stomach when the curtains were parted and the auditorium was filled with more faces than you'd ever stood before. What you may not remember is the amount of focused reading you did to learn your part and to know the parts of others well enough to know when you should act or speak. Working together with your partner alone or with a small group to produce a play can be a rewarding experience for all involved. You may begin with a familiar story and work together to write a script. Then there are parts to read and reread through many rehearsals before the performance is ready for an audience. The play may be presented through the use of puppets with your partner and friends reading the parts of different voices. In any case, the process is clearly one that involves the use of many practical reading strategies and skills.

Working with an Individual Child over Time

Working with one child over an extended period of time, such as one school year, can be among the most rewarding experiences you'll have. The one-to-one setting enables you to gain intense knowledge of the child's reading habits, strengths, strategies, interests, and limitations. When working with one child over time you soon find that you visit libraries with your partner in mind. You find yourself running across a new title or an old favorite saying, "I should check this out, it would be perfect for our next meeting." It is thrilling to make progress as a team, to see your partner gain confidence and competence as a literate being.

Example Situations

Lester L. Laminack

Excerpted from *Volunteers Working with Young Readers*

Consider the following situations. Each of these scenarios is organized to give you a thumbnail sketch of some of the possibilities. As you read you will find a situation introducing a child and a bit of literacy history. This will be followed by some things for you to consider before taking action and a few suggestions for working with the specific situation. This in turn is followed by a brief description of how the principles above are working in each situation. As you read, pause after each situation and note what you would do if you found yourself working with the child featured. Then compare your initial reactions to the considerations and suggestions given. Where there are differences in what is presented here and in your initial reactions you might want to talk the situation through with your host teacher or the coordinator of your volunteer project. Clearly what is presented here is by no means an exhaustive list of possibilities. Many things must be considered, and each situation involves an individual child with his or her personal history. These situations are here merely to acquaint you with some of the possibilities and to provide a demonstration of the thinking process you might adopt before taking action when working with children in literacy development.

IN THIS SECTION

Example Situations and Principles in Practice

- Nathan, Age 7, Grade 2
- Meg, Age 9, Grade 3
- Erica, Age 6, Grade 1
- Trent, Age 7, Grade 1
- Eddie, Age 8, Grade 2

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SITUATION: NATHAN, AGE 7, GRADE 2

Nathan brings a copy of *Frog and Toad Together* to his third meeting with you. As you listen to him read you notice that when he comes to an unfamiliar word he almost always stops and looks up at you. Occasionally, he will attempt to sound out the first letter, but usually he just sits looking at you and waiting.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ...

- whether Nathan has had adequate time to become familiar and comfortable with you? Could he be searching for cues from you as to how you wish to deal with unfamiliar words? Remember that adults don't all agree on what is best for children in many situations. Nathan has lived long enough to discover that different adults have different expectations. He may be simply feeling his way through to find your expectations.

- what Nathan typically does when confronted with an unfamiliar word while reading in the classroom alone or in a small group?

- whether Nathan believes that the good readers are those who get all the words right?

- whether Nathan believes that he will be corrected or criticized for missing a word?

HAVE YOU TRIED ...

- asking Nathan what he usually does when he is reading alone and comes to an unfamiliar word?

- encouraging him to skip over the word and read on to the end of the sentence, paragraph, or page when he comes to a word that causes him to stop and look at you?

- asking him to read through a section of the story or text, then stopping to retell that section? Does he understand what he has read? Is the individual word critical to the meaning of the story? Can he return to the word with the meaning of the whole and make sense of the word he had trouble with? showing Nathan how to preview the material before reading. On a sticky note make a list of any of the words you expect him to stop on. Then you could try any of the following:

✓ Cover those words with a small sticky note and read along with Nathan. Tell Nathan that when he comes to one of those places, he can just keep going. At the end of the selection have him retell the story. Ask yourself: Does Nathan understand what he has read? Is the individual word critical to the meaning of the story? Can he return to the covered words with the meaning of the whole and make sense of them?

✓ Cover those words with a small sticky note and have Nathan listen and follow along. While you are reading aloud for Nathan, model the above strategy for him to see how readers make sense of unfamiliar text. As you complete the selection, retell what you read. Go back into the text and stop at each covered word and use the context to show what the word might be. Uncover the word and use the letters/sounds to verify your attempts. By thinking aloud at these points in the text you can show Nathan how readers use the cues of language to identify unknown words. As you verify those words that had been covered, continue reading softly-just say the word and allow him to join in again when and where he is comfortable with the text.

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Literacy Develops over Time
Remember that you are working with Nathan because he needs more time, more attention, more demonstrations, and guidance. Not only does he need time on the clock and the calendar, but he also needs time with books, time listening to language in story and text, time in the presence of a literacy mentor who will live out the strategies he is trying to develop.

Reading Is Understanding
Remember that getting the words right is only one concrete way the world has to determine whether a person did read. However, when getting the words right becomes a child's (or adult's) definition of reading, the focus is shifted away from making sense and constructing meaning-understanding. Continuously demonstrate through your comments, questions, strategies, and other interactions with Nathan that the goal of reading is to make sense of what is written.

Instruction Needs to Be Provided in a Supportive Environment
Remember that you cannot teach Nathan if you cannot reach Nathan. In other words, he has to understand that you are there to support him and guide him. He has to know, without doubt, that he can trust you to honor and respect his honest attempts. No child (indeed no student of any age) will take the risk to explore with new strategies and ideas unless the teacher, tutor, mentor has demonstrated his or her trustworthiness. From the first moment you meet you must always focus your demonstrations and instruction in ways that support Nathan's strengths and lead him to grow into the next possibility.

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SITUATION: MEG, AGE 9, GRADE 3

In your meetings with Meg you notice that she gets most words right as she reads aloud for you. When there is a word she falters on, she usually stops and quietly sounds the word out. She doesn't always come up with the correct pronunciation, but she seems confident that she is correct. At times she comes up with a pronunciation that does not even sound like a word, but she continues to move along in the text. When she reaches the end of the story or selection she remembers only a few facts and details. She has difficulty summarizing or retelling the story. She also has a difficult time making connections between events in the story.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ...

- whether this pattern is typical when Meg reads aloud?
- whether Meg shows any sign of looking for meaning while reading? Does she make comments like, "Oh, I didn't think he would do that next." Or "Mmmm, that doesn't make sense."
- whether she ever rereads a line, sentence, or paragraph to gain context for those unfamiliar words?
- whether she ever reads on beyond the unfamiliar word to gain context?
- whether, when Meg reads in her class, the students are encouraged to discuss the story, sharing their connections, interpretations, insights, and confusions?
- the books Meg usually reads from in class? Read through a few of the selections yourself. Is there a significant story line? Are the characters believable, do they have personality? Is there conflict or tension in the plot that gives the characters something to do? In short, is there a story? Is there real language? Or does it seem that the purpose of the material is more one of providing practice with identifying words?

HAVE YOU TRIED ...

- reading a short story, a picture book, or a traditional tale to Meg, having her listen to the story without the task of decoding the print? Try it. After reading aloud for her, ask Meg to retell the story to you. This will help you determine whether Meg can focus on the overall frame of the story. If you find that Meg is able to retell the story that you read aloud to her, you can be fairly comfortable with the notion that she can also manage the same when reading similar material on her own.
- selecting meaningful reading material with Meg and having her read the piece in chunks? You could preread the text and place a self-stick note on the page at the most critical junctures. I'd select those places where the characters have a dilemma or conflict that must be resolved and the author has not yet revealed the solution. Meg's focus would be on naming the issue, conflict, dilemma and making some prediction about how the character(s) might resolve it. She could just jot down her thoughts on the self-stick note and move it as she reads on to determine the outcome. In most stories or chapters there would be only two to four places where you would logically stop for this sort of thinking. You might find it necessary to read the selections together so that Meg learns how to identify those critical junctures in the plot. That is essential to having her able to use the strategy in your absence. And remember, our goal is to develop readers and

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writers who function independently. Therefore, we should focus on strategies that are both lasting and transportable. That is, we need to give our students those strategies that will work in many situations and ones that can be used without us present to validate them.

Reading Is Understanding

Here again, a key point is to help developing readers of any age broaden their definitions of reading. Meg's actions provide windows to her beliefs about reading. Her use of "sounding it out" to arrive at a nonword and then continuing on to the end could signal that in her thoughts a good reader is one who can pronounce all the words and "read" to the end. The difficulty she has with summarizing or retelling is a signal that she doesn't see reading as a meaning-making process. This leads us right into another key principle.

Meaning and Making Sense Must Serge as the Frame For Considering Skills

Reading strategies and habits are acquired through consistent demonstration. Meg has most likely been told over and over to "sound it out:" She may have even been interrupted during her reading to be told that she had gotten a word wrong. The implicit message she has heard over and over is that good readers use these skills and always get the words right. In sit uations like these it is very easy for the child to gradually shift attention away from understanding the language to pronouncing all the words. We must remember that any skill can be overemphasized, that no skill is the panacea, that unless the reader constructs meaning from the reading, the skill has proven fruitless. Clearly, there are many useful, essential skills and strategies that readers need to develop. Let us remember the function of each of them is to assist the reader in making sense of the print.

Reading Materials Should Be Authentic

Remember that Meg can read for meaning only if there is sense and meaning in the material she is reading. Many of the materials developed for reading instruction focus more heavily on decodable print and patterns in language than on telling a story. If Meg is to use her reading skills and strategies to make sense of the story, to get at the meaning, there must be identifiable characters with some depth and personality. The story must be couched in a setting that can be imagined, that is clearly establishing a sense of place for the characters to act. The actions of the characters must be played out in a plot that allows the characters to deal with issues, conflict, tension, resolutions, etc. In essence, there must be a story and not just a collection of words strung together just to give the child practice in applying the skill of the week *(The fat cat sat on a mat. The thin pin is in the fat mat. The fat pig can do a jig).*

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SITUATION: ERICA, AGE 6, GRADE 1

While working with Erica you notice that she seems to be "frozen to the page" each time you listen to her read. It seems that she struggles with words and seems to move through even simple text at a slow, tedious pace.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ...

- how often Erica has the opportunity to hear fluent reading models in her daily routines?
- the words Erica seems to have control over in her reading?
- the typical strategies you have seen Erica employ when encountering an unfamiliar word?
- whether she tends to use the same strategy when reading back her own words?
- whether she writes her own thoughts and language?
- whether she recognizes words in the story as you read aloud to her whether she recognizes and identifies the logos commonly used in her community?

HAVE YOU TRIED ...

- reading aloud to her at every meeting? Choose something she enjoys and read to her with smooth, fluent expression. Don't be fake and overdramatic; just be sincere and read with a voice you'd enjoy listening to. Remember, your purpose here is not to teach her new words or strategies for identifying words. Here the point is to give Erica a sampling of the beautiful language, vivid images, chilling adventures, warm memories that can lie in wait among the words and pages of books. Your job, then, is to provide consistent exposure to great stories and proficient, fluent models of reading. It is important for young readers to hear the rhythms and cadences of language read aloud. Just as in other aspects of learning, the student needs to see print, observe the strategies of a good reader in use, to hear the language of authors come to life through the voice of a proficient reader. Having this consistent demonstration provides the young reader with the experience to envision what readers do when they interact with print, to create a "sound image" of the voice of written language.

- providing a selection of predictable books for Erica to listen to, read alongside you, and read for you? If you read *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* aloud and let Erica see the illustrations and print as you read, she could both see and hear the patterns in the language and the additional support provided by the illustrations. After you have read the book to her once or twice, invite her to read along if she hasn't already done so on her own. Pause where you can allow Erica to chime in, using the clues from these patterns to identify words in the story. As you read together note which clues and patterns Erica seems to use. Take the opportunity to point out any additional clues along the way.

- having Erica use taped read-alongs? She could have a selection of "comfortable" books, those books she has read successfully and has confidence and control with. Using these "comfortable" books, Erica can listen to the tape and read along. Beginning this process with "comfortable" books is important because these allow Erica to focus on rhythm, *flow,* and cadence in the voice of the taped reading. As she listens and silently follows along she is rehearsing that rhythm, *flow,* and cadence-fluency. After listening and reading along silently she will be invited to read along aloud. You could have her listen with earphones or

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without. Using earphones will provide a continuous model and support while you have the opportunity to hear her read along and note her progress.

Children Bring a Wealth of Knowledge to School

Erica has six years of experience in the world as a language user. She listens, initiates, and responds in conversations. She can recall events in detail and sequence from this morning and from her last birthday party-a year ago. She lives in a world virtually littered with print-billboards, street signs, advertising, labels, logos, magazines, and newspapers. She, like most children, is a frequent viewer of television. She interacts with family and friends with ease. Erica has favorite family stories, memories from birthdays and holidays, knowledge of rules for the games she plays with other kids who live near her. Through television she knows about places she has never visited. She has an extensive collection of shells and thinks of herself as an expert. Remember that knowing the child is essential to teaching the child. All that experience, all that knowledge, all that language is the foundation upon which you will build. Think of the power of books and stories you two could develop around family tales, rules for games, classifying the shell collection.

Literacy Is Language

Remember that it is language we read and write. Clearly there are differences between written and spoken language, but they are both language. Because this is so, the child's facility with spoken language should be used as a bridge to written language. Developing Erica's ear for the flow and rhythm of written language in stories gives her a way to anticipate the writer that parallels her ability to anticipate a speaker and finish his or her sentence. Developing her ear for the language of stories, poems, information books builds a frame for her to use as a writer just as the language of her most immediate family builds the frame for her first attempts with speech. Erica's reading and writing are grounded in her listening and speaking. Literacy is language.

Literacy Develops over Time

Here again, it is essential to remember that learning occurs over time through repeated demonstrations by others who play a significant role in the child's life. Erica is six years old. Continuously provide demonstrations of what you hope she will grow into. Show how you use the strategies and skills you hope she will develop for herself. Demonstrate how those important pieces help you to make sense of the written language in the world. Telling about it is never enough. You must live it out before her very eyes and it must be tied to something she finds relevant. Once is never enough. It takes time.

Meaning and Making Sense Must Serve as the Frame For Considering Skills

Remember that skills are useful only when they lead to making sense and helping the child understand the written language. Remember that skills and strategies are useful only when they can be utilized independently by the child. That is, when the teacher/tutor/mentor is not present to verify the outcome. In Erica's case it would be too easy to jump to the conclusion that what she needs is an array of word-attack skills. Just remember that any skill, in order to be useful, must be presented in the context of its function. That is to say that Erica has to learn skills and strategies as they are useful to her in the process of making sense of print.

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SITUATION: TRENT, AGE 7, GRADE 1

As you read with Trent, you notice that his confidence is much greater as a reader than as a writer. He tends to select books that are appropriate to his proficiency. When selecting books of high interest that are beyond his own ability, he seeks someone to read aloud to him. When he reads aloud, there is confidence in his voice and he uses "story inflection." Although he has good strategies for identifying unfamiliar words and good fluency when reading aloud, he frequently skips entire lines of the story.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ...

- why Trent sometimes skips entire lines while reading aloud?
- why he might be so reluctant to write even though he seems to have developed some good reading strategies?
- Trent's ability to select materials at the appropriate level for his purposes?
- the possibility that Trent's reluctance to write could be linked to his ability as a reader and sense of self as a literate individual?
- that his reluctance to write may result from the power of his ability as a reader? For example, he may be unwilling to attempt committing his thoughts to print when he is very aware of the fact that what he writes is not like what he sees in the books he reads. Because of that awareness, Trent may be less likely to commit to writing all those words he uses in speaking and can identify when reading.

HAVE YOU TRIED ...

- encouraging Trent to use a bookmark to slide down the page as he reads? The bookmark could cover the lines of print he has read. This would help focus his attention on upcoming text and help with his habit of skipping entire lines of print.
- using a "talking book" to encourage Trent to write? This can be a notebook dedicated to conversations you have with Trent where neither of you speak. You write to him and he responds to you, like e-mail in a notebook. The point here is twofold. One, you provide a constant demonstration of putting thoughts and ideas in print. Two, you provide an opportunity for Trent to write for a clearly identified audience that is nonjudgmental. That is to say that you, as audience, will be the only one to read the conversations, you are present to clarify when necessary and do not hold the power of grading the work. The book has an added benefit, that is, it becomes a permanent record of progress.

Language Is Social

Remember that language is a means of sharing what is known. Trent clearly understands the potential of language to communicate the ideas of others, as he is developing as a proficient reader. He has a well-developed expressive vocabulary as a speaker and initiates as well as responds in conversation. Here you have the opportunity to help him realize the same potentials in written language. The language potentials he has realized as a reader can be useful in helping him to develop as a writer.

Instruction Needs to Be Provided in a Supportive Environment

Remember that Trent has many strengths as a learner and as a language user. Be careful to provide demonstrations for Trent that build on these strengths and allow him to make approximations or try out new things as a reader/writer without fear or penalty.

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Children Bring a Wealth of Knowledge to School

Trent brings not only his experience in the world, he also brings successful strategies as reader. As with any child, the wise among us would make use of this knowledge as a foundation for other learning. Trent's confidence and competence as a reader can be a useful hinge for growing him into an equally confident and competent writer.

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SITUATION: EDDIE, AGE, GRADE 2

In your very first meetings with Eddie, it becomes clear, that he has very little confidence, as a reader. He is reluctant to attempt print and generally responds, "I don't know that word," or "I can't read." If nudged, he will struggle with the first sound, make a random guess, pick out the few words he knows, or create a story to explain the illustrations when they are present.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ...

- what has stripped Eddie of his confidence as a reader? Building an image of oneself as a reader is something that occurs over time. It is through several successful experiences with print that this sense of self slowly builds. Losing that confidence is also something that occurs over time. It is unlikely that a single event would be the cause. Therefore, it is worth the time to explore how Eddie has developed this image of himself.

- the significant impact of self-confidence upon performance? Think about your own experiences in life. Don't you usually do better in those areas or tasks you believe you will be successful in? Don't you experience much greater anxiety over those tasks that you believe yourself less competent in? In many ways, confidence is gained through successful attempts at a task or experience. Likewise, confidence can fuel further attempts. This cycle leads to competence. In short, confidence begets competence.

- how you can help Eddie regain the confidence and reestablish that sense of self he needs to move forward? What can you do during each meeting with Eddie that will build both confidence and competence?

- the knowledge of story-structure and language that Eddie must have? In order to create a story to explain the illustration, Eddie must have an understanding of the structure and organization of stories. He must also have a grasp of the language used in stories. The key here is to learn to recognize and attend to the strengths a child brings to any experience. It is much too easy to focus on the deficits, that is, what the child can't do. When it becomes our focus, we too often fail to see what the child can do.

- how could you build on Eddie's knowledge of story structure and language to advance his confidence and proficiency as a reader?

HAVE YOU TRIED ...

- working with Eddie to create a book of labels, logos, and print from advertising and product packaging? You could bring several sales papers from the local area and ask Eddie to bring some logos and labels from products he uses at home. Ask Eddie to sort through them and select those he can read. Clip those he selects and ask him to name them for you. As he does, he could paste them in a blank book. I'd suggest one item per page. As you complete a few, review the pages asking Eddie to read the logo on each page. As he names the product, confirm his reading; then write in clear, bold print This is ____ . In the blank you would write the word Eddie provides. For example, if JIF is the logo he selects, and he reads it as *peanut butter*, you'd write This is *peanut butter*. Here you'll have a common pattern (This is ____) on each page. The new word on each page will be keyed to the logo featured there. Eddie's familiarity with the logo will provide the support to take the risk to believe himself able to read the page. This security will give Eddie successful experience and a context for developing skills.

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- inviting Eddie to tell the story presented in a wordless picture book. As Eddie tells the story presented in the illustrations, you can write his "text" on sticky notes to accompany each illustration or spread. Place the notes on the appropriate pages as they are written. As each page is completed, re-read it with Eddie or invite him to read it for you. When the entire story is complete read it back to Eddie as he follows along and listens for anything he might like to change. When you've read it through twice and he is satisfied with the text, you might rewrite it on sticky notes or type it on a word processor so that you could have several copies. Eddie could have one copy of just the text. Another might be cut into strips and paper clipped to the pages to approximate typical book print. Once again, you provide a support system for him. The illustrations that stimulated Eddie's language for the text will still be there. Eddie's language will be there as well on the sticky notes or from the word processor. Again, you demonstrate that ideas, images, experiences are expressed through language which can be captured in one form through print, which can be revisited again and again through reading.

- using a similar process, you can create several new texts for Eddie to read. Use any significant event, photo, comic strip or memory that Eddie indicates an interest in. Talk with him about the event and make notes. Use the notes together with Eddie to stimulate elaboration, adding details, sequencing, and generation of a written draft. Encourage Eddie to write as much of this as possible. Although you are generating a text for Eddie to improve his reading confidence and competence, you must also attend to the whole of his language development. That of course, includes his development as a listener, as a speaker, as a reader, and as a writer. And inasmuch as language is a dynamic thinking process, you will sharpen his ability to reason, consider multiple points of view, observe, question, categorize, classify, and articulate his insights and confusions.

Literacy Develops over Time

It is true that Eddie has had time on the clock and on the calendar; he is eight years old. But, remember that it is more than the passing of minutes, days, months, and years that developing readers need. They need to spend time engaging in purposeful and meaningful interactions with written and spoken language. Just as it takes time to develop confidence and competence, it also takes time to slowly dissolve those same attitudes and abilities. The essential piece is how the time is spent, which takes us into the next principle.

Instruction Needs to Be Provided in a Supportive Environment

Sometimes the most well-intended instruction may be perceived by the child as foreign, intrusive, abstract, and confusing. Providing instruction in a supportive environment is less about your intentions and genuine caring than it is about building on what the child knows and understands. Clearly the child needs your emotional support, that is, your kindness and empathy. More important to the child's success is the support you provide by ensuring that materials are relevant to the child's experience and interest, by ensuring that the strategies you demonstrate are clearly connected to making sense of written language, by ensuring that the strategies you demonstrate are ones the child will be able to use even when you are not there to verify, and by assuring the child that you will continue providing the demonstrations as long as they are necessary.

Reading Materials Should Be Authentic

Remember that for Eddie to construct meaning from the text using the strategies you demonstrate, there must be meaningful language on the page. To be authentic, the material has to be relevant to Eddie and in language that could stand alone outside the world of school and reading instruction. Remember, if the materials were written to provide nothing more than practice pronouncing words and practice imple-

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menting a particular rule, then there is nothing authentic about them. And in that case they will be all the more abstract and meaningless to Eddie.

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Questions to Use in Book Chats

1. Share a passage with me that
   - shows an emotion or a mood
   - uses interesting or beautiful language you don't totally understand
   - describes an important character
   - contains the climax of the book
   - reminds you of something in your own life.

   (Choose just one of these to explore with the student. Have him or her read the passage to you or summarize it if it's very long. Have the student explain/discuss).

2. Does this book remind you of another you've read? How?

3. Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?

4. What part of the book was the best, in your opinion? Why?

5. How did the main character in your book change from beginning to end?

6. What new facts did you learn from the book? What new insights or opinions do you have now?

7. What would you change about the book? Why?

8. What was especially challenging about this book?

9. What was especially effective about this book?

10. What was a problem in the book, and how was that problem resolved?

Tips

- Keep conferences positive and focused on students' sharing reflectively.
- Feel free to share your own insights, experiences, and ideas!
- Encourage further reading, please.

NAME: _____

Book Title	# of Pages	Author	Date Begun	Date Finished	Rating 1 2 3 4 5

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Positive Parent Involvement

By Arlene Midgett Clausell

It is very important for parents to be involved in their child's education. The involvement must be positive. A negative involvement can only result in ill feelings for all who are involved.

To develop this positive involvement, we must see parents as an important link to continue what we teach. Single-parent families, grandparents, adopted, foster, or two- parent families can all serve in this role. Because of this recognition, many educators address notes home to "Dear Families". Involvement in the school results in a tremendously positive experience for the child and any or all involved family members.

In teaching and working with parents over many years, I have repeatedly observed these qualities: they love their children; they usually treat their children the way that they were treated by their parents; and many want to help, but are also afraid to volunteer. I have recruited many parents who turned out to be wonderful workers. When I asked them why they hadn't been active previously, their response was usually that they didn't feel welcomed by the teacher. In fact, some teachers new in their careers might be unsure about or lack confidence in inviting parent participation. And the same lack of confidence could be true for parents. We all benefit from working beyond first impressions. Here are several successful ideas to add to your "parent involvement" repertoire.

At my school, we have a welcoming celebration. Music is piped through the intercom; punch and cookies are served; and the teachers, principals, guidance counselor, and sometimes the superintendent welcome students and parents on the first day of school. It's a good way to set the pace for the year. When the bell signals time for the teachers and students to get to class, the PTA members and principal share some information and answer questions. During the first two weeks of school, we have evening parent meetings for each grade. During this time, teachers meet with all the parents and inform them of the expectations of both students and parents. The parents then are invited to ask questions.

At a school at which I worked in the past, we had an evening picnic for the families. The parents' meeting took place during that evening. We obtained donations from local businesses for refreshments. It was a very pleasant evening; even grandparents came and found value in the meeting.

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I make a special effort to introduce myself to parents, grandparents, and thank them for taking the time to come to school. I invite them to become involved in volunteering at the school. At our school there is a parent volunteer coordinator who sends a list of volunteer responsibilities home with each child for the parents. The parents then choose what they would like to do. The parents are trained to do these activities. The range of responsibilities is wide so that there is the potential for all to feel they can volunteer successfully.

Some possible jobs are: stapling papers, helping in the library, reading to children, contacting other parents, helping in the school office, and at times taking things home to complete if they can't stay. If they have certain talents and would like to share them with students, encourage them to do so (for example, writer, carpenter, artist, traveler, etc.). The list goes on. Participation helps them feel welcome in the school environment and the school itself. The children are proud of their parents' activities, and it is common to see the children smiling when they run into their parents around the school.

These are just a few possibilities for getting parents involved in a positive way. A final rule that we should always keep in mind is: treat all parents the same. Get beyond first impressions. Don't judge parents or the amount of education that they appear to have. These factors as well as others should not dictate how parents and children are treated. Consider the parent to be your partner in developing a wonderful, talented, and happy human being, their child.

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Becoming Proactive: The Quiet Revolution

The problem is, by now, a familiar one. The public conversation about educational issues—and in particular about curricular issues in Language Arts instruction—has become more of a monologue in which legislators, reporters, school boards, and ordinary citizens make claims about classroom pedagogy that only sometimes reflect the reality of schools and children. Frustrated teachers are at a loss about what to do. Already busy, they have little time to devote to educating others about what classrooms are really like or to take on the political forces that seem to define the parameters of the conversation. And so an unfortunate cycle develops: Most citizens get their information about school issues from the articles they read in the paper ("How Whole Language Became a Hot Potato In and Out of Academia: Reading Method Ditched Phonics, Won Adherents but Test Scores Tanked"), many of which call up memories of their own schooling ("We always had spelling bees when I was in school" or "I learned poetry by memorizing rhyme schemes and rhythm. I can spot iambic pentameter a mile away"). When these folks then talk to others about what's happening in schools, their understandings are based on these memories and supported by the negative press they read about new methods, methods those of us in Language Arts know are grounded in sound theory, sound research, and sound teacher practice. Based on these misunderstandings, and fueled by public opinion, school boards in turn make decisions about curriculum and methods that directly impact the classroom.

A perfect case in point was the recent furor over Ebonics, a furor fueled by a wire service story reporting that teachers in Oakland, California, were going to initiate a program to "train teachers to conduct classes in the nonstandard English speech familiar to many African-Americans" (Chiles, A15). Immediately, citizens across the country reacted with strong, sometimes vitriolic stances. And despite the fact that the story was later acknowledged to be "inaccurate," the report had done its damage, leading "the rest of the country initially to believe the Oakland school system was going to 'teach' ebonics"—rather than to train teachers to recognize patterns of speech common to some African Americans and use that understanding as a way to nudge these students into standard English. This inaccurate version became the version of truth believed by both ordinary and prominent citizens around the country, encouraging strong opinions, but opinions based on misinformation.

What can teachers do to change this cycle, to help get the right information into the public eye and ear? The three of us—one university English educator and two middle school teachers—have been part of a group

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of elementary and secondary instructors talking and working together for the past few years to think about how to do just that, to have our voices, the voices of *teachers* informed about issues of language arts curriculum and best practices, heard in the public conversation. And what we have come to believe is that the place to begin is with parents: As we educate parents about what *really* goes on in a classroom that incorporates writing workshop or authentic assessment or choice in reading, we have a way to break the cycle . . . or at least to introduce some alternative stories into it. Parents who are educated about why we teach in certain ways, who are invited into our classrooms to see how we go about certain practices, become informed. And the next time they read an article in the newspaper or hear another parent on the soccer field bemoan the lack of sentence diagraming in the schools, they have access to another story that might factor into their response, a story that counteracts the messages that bombard us every day.

We know that the relationship we forge with parents is always a precarious one, as we balance their vast knowledge about their own children's needs, strengths, desires, and interests with our own knowledge about best practices.

It sounds easy, of course. Teachers educate parents; parents educate others; the conversation about education changes tenor as it becomes much more inclusive. But for teachers, this step of becoming advocates for our own teaching practices is not always an easy adjustment. For many of us, that kind of job description conjures up images of Norma Rae or Ralph Nader on a soapbox chastising people to think in a certain way, a role that most teachers are not particularly comfortable with and that may not be the most appropriate or effective for us. First and foremost, our priority is to teach children, a job that takes an inordinate amount of time. It is vital, then, that any attempt to work with parent education and outreach becomes integrated with the job we already do, so that instead of being perceived as an "add-on" to an already hectic schedule, it's seen as a "part of." Equally important, we know that the relationship we forge with parents is always a precarious one, as we balance their vast knowledge about their own children's needs, strengths, desires, and interests with our own knowledge about best practices. While we have a lot of information to share with parents, we must always remember that this can't be a one-way agenda, carved in stone and unresponsive to individual needs. We can't become preachy, informing those "uninformed" parents how to think about our pedagogy.

What we're talking about is more of a quiet revolution, a revolution that depends on talking and listening, on teachable moments, on stolen time. It becomes a balancing act that factors in the needs of parents and students, as well as the knowledge of all parties, in a time frame that can be carved out of busy lives. It is a quiet revolution that needs to be waged *proactively* rather than *reactively*: reaching out to parents on a day-to-day basis, helping to inform them about certain pedagogical practices and why those practices are part of our classrooms, understanding that the most effective approach to changing people's minds is to address a problem before it arises, before defensive postures take the place of ordinary conversation. We've found that this proactive approach allows teachers to help educate parents in positive and collaborative ways, so that when a news story leads a small group to raise objections and to protest certain practices, these parents are able to approach other parents, administrators, and even a State Board of Education to argue for what they now understand. These parents become articulate defenders of best practices because a teacher has taken the time to explain to them *why* process writing, *why* choice in reading, *why* grammar in context.

What kinds of strategies do the teachers in our group use? We've found the techniques vary, depending on the context of the community, but certain categories of outreach are common: *strategies for community building*, which help bring parents and teachers together so that a team approach to problem solving is possible (Figure 1); *strategies for informing parents*, which help teachers educate parents about curricular issues in the classroom (Figure 2); and *strategies for involving parents* in classroom learning experiences, which help parents understand the curriculum by their participation in it (Figure 3).

In the pages that follow, Kathleen and Julie will each share from their mix of strate-

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Strategies for community building

- introductory picnic or party
- early conferences with parents to learn about their children's strengths, needs, activities
- handout for parents with ways for them to become involved—for all parents, with all kinds of schedules
- notes sent home with positive feedback about students
- public displays of student work (book signings, poetry readings, family writing nights)

FIGURE 1.

Strategies for informing parents

- introductory letter describing curricula
- student-written newsletter about classroom
- casual conversations before and after school or on field trips
- parent inservice nights on topics of their choice
- parent lending library of professional books
- parent-teacher reading and study group
- parent-teacher writing group
- teacher-written booklets about curriculum, with multiple student examples
- teaching letters connected to student published work

FIGURE 2.

Strategies for involving parents

- parent comment sheets attached to student published anthologies
- student-led conferencing
- parent responses to student portfolios
- occasions for parents to write along with students (joint published projects)
- student interviews of family members
- walking journals in which parents and students write about class, pass on to another parent and child
- parent involvement in reader response journals

FIGURE 3.

gies, approaches that are specific to the very different contexts in which they teach: Kathleen's sixth-grade classroom is in a school with a heterogeneous population, in terms of socioeconomics, race, and background experience. Julie's context is an eighth-grade classroom in a very homogeneous, middle- to upper middle-class community.

Kathleen Hayes-Parvin

After 18 years of teaching, I still feel proud every day to say, "I'm a teacher." I've taught in parochial and public settings, in both inner city and urban environments, in special education, regular education, and in inclusion formats, yet one constant remains: parental support is essential to an effective practice, a teaching practice where students, parents, and teachers all feel connected to a community of learners, where all members of the team feel the same pride.

It is because of this belief that I begin each year by building community— inviting, welcoming, and nurturing this coalition of parents, students, and teachers. Invitations may take a variety of forms, but most years, my first communication is a letter asking parents to attend a beginning-of-the-year conference. My colleagues and I compose this letter that we believe honors the parents' voices and allows a format for them to contribute to a conversation about their child, letting us know their child's strengths, challenges, passions, and in particular what methods or techniques have been successful in the past. This is an important first step to let parents know that we really do want their input, while it serves to establish a positive connection before the year even gets going.

This initial contact letter is written in English, but is also translated into Chaldean, as many of our students and their parents are of Iraqi ancestry. We do not want them to be left out due to a language barrier. This added effort, supported by our ESL department, often results in parents from other countries coming to school for the first time. Over the years, we've also become more sensitive to time constraints, understanding that many of our households are supported by single working parents. Thus, we've broadened our invitation to allow for a conference via phone or letter, both kinds of contact still

providing us with the parents' insights and giving us that positive first contact.

A few weeks later, I extend an invitation to attend our school's open house. Oftentimes I spend a half hour or so personally calling to reinvite parents who, for some reason, were not able to respond to that first conference, knowing that they may benefit most from a positive school contact, and may be resisting for reasons I can't possibly know. These calls take a bit of extra time, but are usually effective and prove to be time well spent; I want parents to know from the beginning that each of them is welcomed into our learning community.

By establishing these contacts, I try to help the parents feel invited into the community of learners of our classroom, paving the way for some more explicit collaborative projects.

Open house gives me a chance to talk about my curriculum face-to-face with parents in a warm and welcoming environment. They get a chance to see the kinds of literacy I value, simply by being in the classroom. Books are everywhere, both a large collection of young adult novels and my own collection of professional literature that informs the stances I take. I place a number of these books in a parent lending library, and each year invite parents to check them out. No one has ever borrowed a book from it, but it sends the message that I'm confident about what I'm doing, have theory behind it, and am willing to share.

Contacts and conferences of this sort continue throughout the year as I extend multiple invitations to parents in hopes of both building the community and introducing them to various aspects of their children's literacy education. Sometimes I use student-led conferences in late May, where students lead their parents through their writing portfolios, graphic representations of both what they've learned and what they know about what they've learned. Most recently, I've introduced an end-of-the-year conference in June, providing a time for us to sit together, talk, reflect on our journey, and contemplate where to go from here.

By establishing these contacts, I try to help the parents feel invited into the community of learners of our classroom, paving the way for some more explicit collaborative projects. Our curricular collaboration begins with the students' first project: a genre study that culminates in a student-written poetry anthology. I place their poems in a three-ring binder, placing a teaching letter in the front. In that letter, I carefully explain what the students have been working on and the strategies for writing poetry that students have incorporated. ("We began the year with poetry so we could focus in on the structure of language. You might notice some of the writer's tricks we've incorporated into our poems.") I then ask the parents to respond in writing to what they have read, making a few suggestions about what they might look for in the student's writing ("Look for detail, alliteration, line breaks, the use of threes, and using old words in new ways. . . . Watch for the use of the five senses. . . . And just as published authors do, we're writing about things that really matter to us."). I start by sending the binder home to a parent whom I know will respond in a creative and positive way, hoping that subsequent parents who receive the binder will get some good ideas for how to respond. Again, parents are urged to write in the language they are most comfortable with. The kids and I translate and transcribe later. Parent responses usually indicate both a celebration of the work the students have accomplished plus an understanding of the techniques we have stressed in class.

The next invitation to write, read, publish, and celebrate our literary journey has become an integral part of our sixth-grade language arts program. It involves parents and students copublishing for our class book. Again, the initial invitation is put into a letter urging parents to compose a piece along with their child's for our next class anthology, usually devised around a theme or genre (for example, "heroes" or "memoir"). A number of parents write, but we've also broadened our scope to include grandparents, siblings, and step-parents. Joyfully, many have accepted over the years, composing stories about their children, their own childhoods, family stories, and a number of other subjects.

We do send home reminder letters or nudge with phone calls occasionally. But we try to make this a low stress, positive experience for the parents. We know writing for

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publication can be intimidating, so we reassure the writers that we'll edit their pieces for them. Parents occasionally drop by the classroom when they've gotten stuck in their writing and need some help revising, and students regularly report on the peer conferences they've held with their parents at home. Parents who have the chance to experience the joys and frustrations of writing and revising a piece begin to get a clearer picture of what their kids are doing in class—and start to see the differences between how they were taught to write and how their children are being taught.

We ask our guest writers to come in to read their pieces whenever they can, thus modeling quality literacy for our students. Once a mom, step-dad, grandma, or big brother has entered our literary sanctuary, a special bond is forged: the kids never forget, and neither do our guests.

Through conferencing, copublishing, and becoming intimately involved in the workings of our classroom, parents begin to understand in some detail the kind of literacy environment in which their children are taught. The terminology and the processes we use take on new and important meaning. Included from the beginning in a proactive way, parents become my best allies and advocates—an invaluable resource.

Julie King

Let's face it; none of us has the kind of time we'd like to spend communicating with and involving parents in our classrooms, but I've come to believe that we need to make the little time we have count a lot. As I try both to inform parents about my teaching and to involve them in the curriculum, I hope it becomes time well spent.

My first year, I radically changed my practice from a traditional approach to one incorporating workshop, choice in reading, and authentic assessment. I spent a great deal of time working to inform parents about what students were learning in the classroom—through both an initial letter home (which described what their child would be doing in school and what they might look for at home) and a student-generated newsletter (which described, in the students' own words, things like peer conferences, workshop, reading response journals, and author's chair) so the parents might begin to picture our classroom. While I continue to use these strategies, this year I added a new outreach idea to my repertoire: a booklet I wrote for parents, entitled "Seeking Common Ground: A Parent's Guide to Process Writing and Assessment." In this booklet, I describe terminology related to my teaching, such as stages of writing, portfolios, and authentic assessment. I believe parents need to understand the language of best practices, as well as the whys of our teaching. The booklet contains definitions, classroom portraits of students (including samples of their writing), as well as tips for how to help their children with writing at home. Handed out to parents at conference time, this book helps to explain my philosophy of teaching in friendly language with concrete examples.

Included from the beginning in a proactive way, parents become my best allies and advocates—an invaluable resource.

While providing parents with this kind of information does help, I began to realize that even though I was *telling* them how our classroom and homework activities would increase student literacy, many of them never had the opportunity to *see* these activities in action. For many parents, the only feedback they received was a letter grade at the end of every ten weeks. Because of this, I've added yet another layer of outreach—involving parents in the actual classroom work.

The first outreach I tried was with our reader response journals. Students in my class were responsible for reading 30 minutes a day and writing three pages a week in response to the books and articles they were reading. Once a week, students wrote a letter to someone else (to me or to another student) about their reading, asking that person to write back. After the students became accustomed to this format, I began requiring a rotation of letters to parents or other adults at home, once every three weeks. While a few parents' letters responded merely to the mechanics of the writing, most responded with excitement, recommending reading the students might like, or offering models and stories about their own literacies.

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> *I didn't have to singly educate parents about what we were doing; the students themselves did the teaching and parents could see the value in our learning experiences.*

An immediate advantage to this process was the way in which *students* explained to their parents the classroom practices and expectations for their reading. Marshall writes:

Ms. King is making us write to you for our reader's response letter. Usually we talk about the book we are reading. I'm reading *Call Waiting* by R. L. Stine. You wouldn't probably like these books that much because they aren't as long as the books you read and they are mysteries.

His mom responds:

I am thrilled that you are reading books and enjoying them. Reading has been one of my all-time favorite things to do. I like all types of books, including mysteries. Keep up the good work. I love you.

Later in the year, Marshall begins to describe his learning:

I have been reading a lot more books lately and I think I've improved in my reading skills. Such skills include better understanding of vocabulary and faster reading. And I know that you like that, right? Well, I think after this year, I'll be a much better reader and I'll like reading a lot more, but that isn't for a while.

His mom responds:

I am so happy that you are reading more (even if Ms. King is making you). The more you read, I'm sure you will come to love it as much as I do.

In addition to informing parents about our classroom learning, the letters gave my students extended models of literacy beyond the classroom and facilitated conversations about reading and home. Jenny's mother writes to her:

You asked about what book I'm reading in my spare time?? What spare time?? . . . I'm reading all my nursing books and the dosage books for my classes now. You would probably find these books boring and very difficult, but I enjoy them somewhat.

She continues throughout the year to write about her reading for classes and to recommend some books that Jennie might like to read:

"I really enjoyed *Face on the Milk Carton.* Hopefully someday you'll read that one."

These conversations gave students exposure to a variety of adult literacies. Many parents recommended books for their children to read. And frequently students took those recommendations seriously. In Dawn's case, her parents recommended the classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird.* While this book was a challenge to her, the letter exchange with her parents helped her to move from a literal level to a level of deeper questioning. Her mother writes:

Your book sounds very interesting. I've enjoyed the parts when you read them out loud to me. Do you think the Radley house sounds like a creepy place?

Dawn begins to ask her parents questions about the reading:

I don't know why the book is called *To Kill a Mockingbird,* because it has nothing to do with a mockingbird. Jem and Scout got air rifles for Christmas and their dad, Atticus said that it was a sin to kill a mockingbird, but that's the only time they ever said, "To kill a mockingbird."

Her father responds:

Try and take some more time to think about the book and see if there isn't a hidden meaning to the title.

By reading and responding to the letters, parents were exposed to the ways my students were learning about reading. They saw the different texts students were exposed to, as well as their developing understanding and analysis of those texts. They could see in those letters their children's developing literacy. I didn't have to singly educate parents about what we were doing; the students themselves did the teaching and parents could see the value in our learning experiences.

A second outreach practice I incorporated this year was involving parents in the portfolio process. Every marking period, each of my students puts together a portfolio that includes a reflective letter articulating a personal evaluation of his or her learning over the year. In the past, some parents have had difficulty understanding how this works, mainly because they do not have the opportunity to see the writing their children have done.

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This year, I began requiring my students to take the portfolio home to share with parents before my evaluation. The emphasis was on the students "showing off" their work, and taking their parents on a tour of their improvements over the year. Parents, in turn, filled out a Parent Response sheet, which asked them to respond to several questions designed to give both the children and me feedback about the work in the portfolio. I also designed a teaching letter for the parents, inviting their participation and asking them to be constructive in their responses: "It is a place where you can give positive feedback, ask your child questions about his or her writing, as well as give suggestions."

As with the reader response letters, the parent responses to portfolios provided an ideal way for students to share with their parents the kinds of classroom practices I use. Rather than merely telling them about the kind of literacy experiences students had in my class, the portfolios gave parents evidence to see how students were improving in their writing skills.

Students received helpful responses from their parents, particularly in terms of their improvement: "Better vocabulary," one parent wrote. "Expressing himself more clearly." According to another, "I have seen a definite improvement in Jennie's writing style. Her scenarios are enjoyable to read (not boring) and the spelling and punctuation is really improving. Her writing is at a more mature level."

When parents ask questions on the response form, it gives me the opportunity to contact them individually to address their concerns. Sometimes questions are addressed to the student regarding his or her writing,..and other times parents use this as a time to address their specific concerns to me. Through the portfolio responses, I have been able to continue conversations with parents about how specific instruction works, or even how they can provide greater help at home.

My goal with parent outreach is to increase parent involvement in student learning. In a state where standardized tests drive real estate markets, it is increasingly difficult to continue to balance what I believe my students need in the classroom with mounting pressure from the school community "to raise scores." While I am passionate about continuing best practice instruction based on current research, I cannot ignore the expectations and needs of my parent community. Quite often, we fall short in education by not extending what we know about how our students learn and what they need into the community. As I develop as a teacher each year, my goal is to increase the blend of classroom learning with community involvement, beginning with the parents. If we are to gain support for what we do, we must begin there.

Seizing the Moment(s)

As teachers in the '90s, we are well aware that our ability to continue to teach in the ways we believe depends heavily on the understanding and good will of the communities surrounding us. Horror stories abound of places where teachers are no longer allowed to teach in certain ways, as mandated curricula turn into mandated practices, all too often based on outdated and rigid approaches to teaching. We've chosen to use that reality to push us to do something we know we should be doing anyway: educating the parents in our communities before the attacks start, helping them see what we are doing as sound educational practice based on research and experience. We aren't naive about this; we know that our proactive approach may not work in every situation, given the political nature of schooling and the strongly organized forces that are opposed to many of the practices we see as vital. But our own attempts to work with parents show us this: a proactive approach can make a big difference in helping parents recognize a different story about schooling, based on the positive experiences of their own children. And parents do talk about these experiences and their new understandings—at the soccer game or in the grocery line, often inadvertently spreading the word to other parents and other community members. Parents who understand what we are

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doing can become our strongest advocates in the community—and as teachers, we need to take advantage of the opportunity this affords us to have our stories heard in circles larger than our immediate classrooms.

Teachers *can* make a dent in the repetitive monologue about what's wrong with schools; by becoming proactive, we can help write the next chapter in the story of educational practices in our country. In our minds, it's no longer a choice; it's a matter of survival.

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Beyond Tourette Syndrome

Joey

Jumps in the air and kicks his heels to his buttocks

Blurts out profanity when he can't substitute a word that starts with the same sound fast enough

Carries an index card to lick, instead of the nearest person

Shoves his hands in his pockets when he feels like pulling his pants down

Asks for a short pencil so he won't break a long one

Chews pretzels when he begins to bark

Moves a seat away from his friend at lunch so he won't touch her food

Asks, "What is a curse from God?
My mom said it."

When we read a poem
Written by a girl who
Compares her mother to a rose,
Joey stares—
Eyes blank
His body slumped in his chair
Chin damp with saliva.
He raises his hand
And says,
"But a rose has thorns."

—Bonnie Beers
Ivymount School
Rockville, Maryland

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